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# THE INTERCHANGE

MARCH, 1985

## DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS' EMPLOYEES' NEWSLETTER



What began as a "routine" legislative session in January quickly became complicated. A bill to correct an error made in 1983 on a program to provide revenue to the Highway Reconstruction Trust Fund from the Coal Tax stalled in committee. All attention focused on the bigger problem of expected shortfalls in state revenue, which were just coming to light. The correction sought by the Department would have required some General Fund revenue. With the growing con-

(cont. on back)

**REPRESENTATIVE JOHN HARP, KALISPELL, CHAIRMAN** of the House Highways Committee, listens to a colleague at a meeting with Department of Highways Administrators. The House and Senate Highway Committees heard about construction and maintenance, speed zone setting and the role of the Montana Highway Commission at meetings in Helena early in January. (more photos, page 2)

## NEWS FROM THE CAPITOLS

The State Legislature and the Congress have a major effect on highway construction and maintenance and that fact is especially clear as the March *Interchange* goes to press. Dollars—that key ingredient in any highway program—is the issue.

From Washington, news came on March 5th that the House and Senate had agreed on an Interstate Cost Estimate (ICE) and had sent the legislation to the President for signing.

Essentially, the ICE makes Interstate construction funds available to the states. Delays in passing an ICE forced many states to delay construction on Interstate projects. In Montana, a bond program passed by the 1983 Legislature allowed the Department to commit funding and kept projects flowing smoothly despite the "hold-up" on federal funds. Now, with approval of the ICE, two major Interstate "gap" projects will likely go to contract as planned in June. The projects are Butte North on I-15 and Springdale West on I-90 between Big Timber and Livingston.

In Helena, no final decisions have been made. The Department's budget was acted favorably on by a legislative sub-committee, but the full committee hasn't acted yet on their recommendation. Further, Director Gary Wicks is quick to point out that a bigger issue is left to be grappled with. That issue is revenue—how the budget will be financed.

"Budget is only half the answer," according to Wicks. "Without the revenue to cover our budget, we can't carry out our program."



**VERN BORDEN**, Missoula District Engineer, developed a "hitch" in his "get-a-long" (see Missoula, page 2.) Caricature by Roger Scott, FHWA.





**GIVE AND TAKE**—Highway Commissioner Maria Murray, Butte, and Director Wicks listen to a discussion with legislators. Commission Chairman Ilert Hellebust, Havre (center), fielded several questions about the Commission's role in decision-making. Representative Helen O'Connell, Great Falls (right photo), expressed some of the frustration felt when requests to the Commission or the Department get a "no" answer.

## BARNARD IN WASHINGTON

by Judy Bauch

Tom Barnard, Great Falls District Engineer, gave a presentation entitled "Montana Construction Management Systems" in January at the 64th Annual Transportation Research Board Meeting in Washington, D.C. Transportation experts from around the world participated in the meeting.

Tom reports Washington has a new subway system, "Metro-Rail" which he found very interesting. The high volume of people and traffic did not impress him, though; as with most Montanans he prefers the wide open spaces.

## NEWS FROM EASTERN MONTANA

by Patty Zimmerman

Eastern Montanans were glad to see the Interstate between Miles City and Terry open to four-lane travel in November. The project will be completed this summer.

Glendive personnel are getting excited about the office addition that is to be built this summer. Bid letting was February 27. We like being a close-knit family, but not being quite as close will be nice.

Our close-knit family did have time on February 6 to show respect for our elders. It was a long strenuous day for Dear Old Dad (alias Jay Randall), but he did manage to fight his way through the balloons and birthday signs in order to celebrate his 39th birthday for the tenth time.

We would all like to congratulate Bob Lamb for receiving the first "Highway Maintenance Person of the Year" award from the Montana Highway Users Federation.

There have been numerous personnel changes in the Glendive District. Floyd Patrick was promoted to Equipment Operator II in Miles City which was vacated by Truman Bovee. Steve

Koelzer transferred from Forsyth to Miles City to fill the truck driver position vacated by Patrick. Pam Dotson transferred to Forsyth to fill the truck driver position vacated by Koelzer. Terry Wickman went back to Wolf Point as the Area Lab Supervisor II. He had been a Civil Engineer III in the Helena Location and Road Design Section.

## MISSOULA REPORTS

by Bonnie Sedita

Our District Engineer suffered a serious accident the weekend of January 19. While shoveling his driveway, Vern Borden fell and broke his leg in three places. Rumors had it that he would be in traction for up to a year, but Vern was back at his desk, at least part-time, by mid-February.

More remodeling is being done in Engineering Services, displacing the space formerly used by Right-of-Way. Our nomad-in-training, Supervisor Jim Weaver, is moving his office once again. He has promised that this will be the last time, but we have seen nothing in writing.

Summer projects are being organized and structured to begin as soon as weather permits. Most of Missoula and Kalispell's temporary engineering personnel were kept over the winter to prepare for the increased construction load. Project Manager Gerald Tahija and his crew moved north to Kalispell and many others will follow to "staff up" for the big construction season ahead.

Increased snowfall on the passes has created a greater drain on overtime, although snow removal activity in the valleys has remained near normal. Adjustments to spring and summer projects will be made to compensate for the drain on the maintenance budget.

The clerical staff in the Missoula office would like to thank and praise our Supervisor, Jacquie Wichman. She helped us get through a tough year. We were under-staffed due to promotions and transfers and had much to learn in conjunction with our increased responsibilities. Thanks Jacquie for a job well done.

## SAFETY

by Duane Meiers,

Billings District Engineer

Safety, according to one dictionary, is "freedom from danger, injury or damage." This explanation appears simple. Therefore, it should be a simple operation to be a safe employee.

Safety is really a relative state of affairs; we know that being the recipient of an annual safety award does not guarantee that we will stay forever trouble free.

Safety equipment assists in making people more noticeable and changes the odds in their favor with respect to keeping out of harms way. This includes clothing and equipment, as well as rest and vacations. They help keep the employee more alert and in condition to avoid many pitfalls.

The knight of old put on his suit of armor and felt he had a big edge on the other knights, who had no armor. But, if his horse dumped him in the river or some other knight put him in the river, he would certainly drown. He was not protected at all times by his armor.

Equipment alone will not do the total job. Safety has to be part of you, so much that it becomes an unconscious act. It cannot be worn as a cloak during working hours and removed when we leave the job site. It must be a way of life. The manner in which we treat ourselves with respect to rest and proper health care becomes a part of safety. The life we live at home and the environment of our home is also a reflection of safety. It requires a lifetime of effort to develop the necessary habits. When we let it slide, it does not take long before we become a loser and a statistic.

**National Transportation Week** is May 12-17. Watch for news on NTW activity. The 24th Annual MDOH **Bowling Tournament** will be May 4th & 5th in Butte. Contact Charmaine Martin. The **NTW Running Challenge** 5 and 10 km race will again be held in May. Watch for dates.

## BUTTE DISTRICT

by Karen Ham

Butte has had a busy, productive winter. We received several compliments from the motoring public regarding how well the roads and passes have been plowed and sanded. Our sectionmen all do a good job, and we appreciate the public acknowledging their efforts.

With the construction season approaching, work will start or resume on numerous projects in the Butte district. On Interstate 15 there are five projects under contract for 21.8 miles. Interstate 90 had three projects totaling 20.8 miles. Primary and Urban projects total 27.3 miles. There are 15 projects scheduled for letting by June, 1985.

We hear from the Bozeman office of a wonderful retirement party for 30-year veteran Louis Maack. Approximately 90 people braved subzero temperatures to send him off in style.

Bozeman reports that Dan Gravage, Engineering Technician I, spent part of February in Caracas, Venezuela, with the 15-member U.S. team competing at a 7-day hang-gliding meet.

Last but certainly not least, Joe Micheletti, Butte's District Right-of-Way Supervisor, transferred to Helena the end of February. We will miss his Irish/Italian wit and wish him well.

## RETIREMENTS

Employees who have recently retired with over 25 years of service with the Department include: Edgar St. John, Billings, 35 years, 8 months; Louis E. Maack, Harrison, 30 years; Dick Vanderwyk, 29 years; Floyd D. Strickler, Bozeman, 27 years, 8 months; and Jerome L. Devine, Roundup, 25 years, 3 months. Other recent retirees are: John Campbell, Helena, 17 years, 7 months; Richard C. Holman, Butte, 17 years, 6 months; Phyllis B. Spaulding, Helena, 13 years, 5 months; William M. Andresen, Helena, 11 years, 8 months; and Pat J. Walsh, East Helena, 8 years, 11 months.



**STILL A KID**—Bob Lamb, Miles City Maintenance Supervisor, was honored recently by the Montana Highway Users Federation. Lamb received the first "Highway Maintenance Person of the Year" award from the Federation. Bob commented he felt like "the kid" when he came to the Department in 1946 and says he still feels like "the kid around the shop." Bob was praised for his unselfishness and work "above and beyond the call of duty."

## KUDOS

Sometimes just a Thank You means so much. Barbara Stoner of Toston, Montana wrote with thanks to Department Personnel "for the fine job they do in keeping the highways in this area safe in all kinds of weather. . . ." Stoner says she appreciates "being able to depend on the best roads possible."

Jim and Muriel Sivils of Charlo wrote with this story. "It was raining as we got to our meeting and the rain froze when it hit the ground. We started home shortly after 9 pm and were surprised at the roads as the state highway workers had been out. They had certainly done an excellent job of sanding."

P. Eaves of West Glacier writes that she travels the West Glacier section every school day. "It is so neat to be able to relax and enjoy the beauty of God's creation as I go to and from school," she wrote. "You have a special job and do a great job!" She also sent a cake.



cern over General Fund revenue shortages, the bill could not be budged.

So far, no solution to that revenue shortfall has been agreed on. The Administration has proposed using mineral royalties which now go into the Highway Fund to finance schools and replacing them with a three-cent fuel tax increase and some additional coal tax funds. The Department's program would receive more under these proposals than was expected going into the session.

According to Wicks, if revenue needs aren't met by the Legislature, the Department will have no choice but to reduce the construction program in 1986/1987 and beyond. "That is something I'm convinced the people of Montana don't want," Wicks said.

Bill Gosnell is responsible for Legislative and Congressional affairs for the Department and he's encouraged by the budget hearings and comments made by legislators. Still, Gosnell is looking ahead to the important business of finding ways to fund the budget. With state revenue from oil, gas and minerals down and the tight federal budget, Gosnell sees revenue as "the short-term and long-term problem at both the state and federal level."

The Interstate is nearing completion, both in Montana and across the rest of the country, Gosnell pointed out, and when construction is completed and paid for, "we may be able to move funding now going to the Interstate program into other areas."

"If we can get through to 1990," Gosnell said, "we could be in good shape."

Of course, budgets and revenue aren't all that the Legislature is concerned with. One proposal would give local governments some authority to set speed limits in school zones. Another would require the Department to post signs directing motorists to Vo-Tech centers.

One bill proposed by the Department which passed and was signed into law permits spending state funds on 1065 miles of "orphan plant." Orphan plant is highway on which the Department has maintenance responsibility, but which is not eligible for federal highway construction funds.

Salary, pension and retirement bills are still working their way through the legislative process. No one is willing to guess for the record what their fate might be. A proposal for a two-point-five percent salary increase is in the works, but so is a proposal to freeze state wages and salaries.

Most of the real action in the 1985 Legislative Session is left to take place in the second half. If the first half is any indication, easy answers will be few and far-between.

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**EUGENE HANSEN**, a Department of Highways truck driver from Lewistown, receives his incentive award plaque and \$500 award from Governor Ted Schwinden. Hansen developed an alternative to blade and hand patching wheel troughs and sink holes. Hansen's system uses a Henderson "little chief" hydraulic conveyor chain bin sander with the spinner removed and a modified farm harrow attached. It saves time and mix and, according to Hansen, "does not hurt ones back."

## WOMEN/MINORITY PROGRAM WORKING

The Department's Civil Rights Unit reports a lot of smiling lately. The reason? All the goals established for the 1984 external Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) program have been met.

Two of the most significant accomplishments, according to Betty Taylor, Unit Manager, are: (1) 93 percent of the available training positions required by construction contracts were filled by minorities and/or females. This compares to approximately 50 percent during 1983. (2) Overall, female employment was up significantly during the 1984 peak construction months. In June, the level was 8.4 percent, in July, 9.5 percent and 10 percent in August.

Three years ago the average female employment was less than 3 percent and most of those females were employed as flagpersons, according to Taylor. During the 1984 season, females worked in all the crafts used by the highway construction industry.

In 1985 the Civil Rights Unit will continue their emphasis on monitoring training program participants, Taylor said, to assure upward mobility for minorities and females is part of each highway contractors Equal Employment Opportunity program.

## MDOH RECEIVES AWARD

The Department received national recognition recently for innovative work on Interstate 15 between Butte and Helena. The project, construction of a new 4-lane interstate which winds through the narrow Boulder River Canyon between Basin and Boulder, was judged Outstanding in the Rural Highway category of the Excellence in Highway Design award program.

The Award is the highest given in the Federal Highway Administration program. According to a glossy, color brochure announcing the awards, the Outstanding designation indicates projects "setting a new standard for Excellence in Highway Design."

The panel of five judges included engineers, a university professor, a landscape artist, and an historian. Other projects judged Outstanding include a major new arterial through the Phoenix Mountain Preserves to downtown Phoenix, the Linn Cove Viaduct hugging the side of Grandfather Mountain on the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina and the renovation of the Wheeling Suspension Bridge crossing the Ohio River near Wheeling, West Virginia. The bridge was first built in 1849 and was, for many years, the world's longest span.

The Boulder Canyon construction began in the fall of 1980 and was completed three years later. It is recognized for incorporating "unusual and innovative features" in an environmentally sensitive area.

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